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G O D ' S U N F O L D I N G P L A N S
F O R H I S C H O S E N P E O P L E S

ISRAEL
AND THE
CHURCH

AMIR
TSARFATI



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Israel and the Church

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*I dedicated my first two books to my family.
However, family can also extend beyond
just those you're related to.*

*I want to dedicate this book to the Behold Israel team,
ministry partners, and close friends. Like Aaron and Hur,
you have held my arms up through the good times and the bad.
I love you, and I am so thankful God has blessed me with you.*

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PART 1:

TWO
CHOSEN
PEOPLES

CHAPTER 1

FEAR NOT

An Unchanging God in an Ever-Changing World

It's Christmas Day, 2019. All twelve seats around the dining table are filled—two generations gathered together. In the living room are a couple smaller tables surrounded with children, the second table having been added this year due to the family expanding to a third generation. Every little hand and every small face appears to have some type of food on it—potatoes, gravy, butter, even corn has found a way to stick on the cheeks of several. Two of the moms excuse themselves from the main table to begin the process of wiping down children and collecting dishes.

Back at the main table, everyone pushes themselves back a little from the food to resist the temptation to indulge in the leftovers. That's when Uncle Barney speaks up—and everyone rolls their eyes. Barney has always been a bit of a conspiracy theorist and, whenever he's given the opportunity, is ready to share his views about the Kennedy assassination, the moon landings, and where Jimmy Hoffa is buried. Before Mom can rescue everyone with the offer of pie, Barney launches into his latest.

“Have you been watching the news?” he begins, using his traditional

six-word intro. “Not the networks or cable junk, but the real news. I saw the other day that there are people in China getting sick from some new virus. People are saying this has the potential to explode across the world. It could even reach pandemic status. If that happens, it’s possible that we may have to shut down the whole American economy. There could be mass quarantines and stay-at-home orders. Only essential businesses would be allowed to stay open. Pastors may even get arrested just for holding church services.”

“Okay, Barney,” Dad interrupts, “that’s getting ridiculous. The idea of the entire national economy shutting down is silly enough, but pastors not allowed to hold services? Come on, we still have a Constitution.”

This leads to a debate between Barney the kook and his outlandish pandemic theory and Dad the realist, whose faith is in the established rule of law. The volume of their banter rises as the tension level increases. Finally, when it seems the back-and-forth is about to blow, Mom rushes in carrying a cherry pie in one hand and an apple pie in the other. She asks Dad, “Honey, will you run into the kitchen? I seem to have forgotten my serving knife.”

Crisis averted—another year when Mom saves the day.

If you had been at that dinner table, whose side would you have been on? I most definitely would have been on the “Let’s have some pie” side. Instead of pie, however, Dad would have had to eat some crow when, a few months later, it become evident that for once, a crazy theory voiced by Barney turned out to be true. What seemed like an absurdity just a few months ago is now a bizarre reality.

As I am writing this, the coronavirus pandemic has swept the world. I am multiple weeks into a nationwide quarantine, and people are now beginning to talk about how we might be able to start opening the country again at an undetermined point in the future. This is a time unlike any other that this world has ever seen, where globally, billions of people have retreated into their homes by government mandate. Thus far, more than 200 countries are afflicted, and the number continues to grow.

By the time you read this, I expect that my nation, Israel, and the

rest of the world will be well on the way to opening up. However, from where I sit right now, the question of our global future is still up in the air.

Unlike past incidents of world conflict, this enemy has chosen no ideology to align with. It has not gathered a coalition of nations to its side. It is not seeking to conquer new territory or to enslave other people groups. This is a lone enemy with one goal in mind—death. There is no reasoning with it. There is no capital city where one could send a peace envoy. This enemy is mindless, irrational, and very powerful. It is also microscopic, invisible to the naked eye, which makes developing a defense strategy against it very difficult.

This is not a battle that will bring about human extinction. There will not be a genocidal slaughter of people groups. The masses will not be forced to leave their homes to be sold off in a foreign land. If anything, this virus is causing people to stay locked inside of their homes. Eventually, I believe that we will track down this enemy and defeat it. We will find a way to treat it and vaccinate against it. We will overcome, as we have so many enemies in the past. But it will be a long battle. Again, as you read this now, I expect that the world will be well on its way to defeating this enemy.

However, in April 2020, as I write this chapter, the war wages. Fear has swept through nations and people groups. Even in the church there is worry over sickness and dying, as well as anxiety surrounding the more temporal concerns of collapsing economies and ongoing government-mandated moratoriums against meeting together. “Where is God in this?” people ask as they pray for a COVID-sick parent or spouse that they can’t even visit.

FEAR NOT

Let’s travel back to a time in history when the people of Israel were in grave danger. An enemy was coming—one that was not microscopic and didn’t invade a person’s body. Rather, this army was all too visible as they trampled through nation after nation, causing death and destruction with their swords and spears and other dangerous weapons of war.

Once this great war machine locked its eyes onto a prize, that city was sure to fall. Now, this nation's gaze had settled on Jerusalem.

The prophets had long said that from the north, evil would come. This particular northern evil had a name—Assyria. Decades earlier, this same empire had annihilated the kingdom of Israel—the ten tribes that, under King Jeroboam, had separated from the southern kingdom of Judah generations before. In 722 BC, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V invaded his rebellious vassals and overtook the nation. The defeated population who had survived the bloody assault were relocated to a faraway land. Now Assyria was back, this time under King Sennacherib, and it was gunning for Judah.

Isaiah was a prophet in that time, and, as such, was acting as God's spokesman to His chosen people. He was married to a prophetess, and together they had two sons—both with quite unusual names. The eldest was named *Shear-Jashub*, which means “a remnant shall return.” We meet the second son in Isaiah 8:3-4, when the prophet reports, “I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, ‘Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz; for before the child shall have knowledge to cry “My father” and “My mother,” the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.’” This boy's mouthful of a name means “speed the spoil, hasten the booty.”

While there may be a debate as to which would cause a child to get picked on more in school—that lengthy name or its meaning—it is actually a special moniker to bear. These progenies of prophets carry prophetic names that tell of the past and the future of Israel. *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz* points to Israel's past of being looted and robbed by an enemy that comes from the outside. *Shear-Jashub*, however, carries in his name a beautiful promise—the remnant will return to the land of Israel.

It is true that I am having to write this during a government-mandated lockdown—very likely an isolation you are familiar with. What is amazing in my case is that I am doing this in the land of Israel. After 2,000 years of being away from the long, narrow stretch of mountains and farmlands and streams and wilderness given to Abraham and

his descendants, I am living proof that God's promises never fail. I am part of the remnant—a child of the tribe of Judah—living in the lush beauty of the Valley of Armageddon. I and all my fellow Jews in Israel are the embodiment of *Shear-Jashub*. How great is our God!

The Assyrian army was coming at Judah from the north. The people were frightened and looking for hope. Isaiah stood in front of the fearful crowd. He was to serve as God's conduit to give the listeners comfort and to remind them of His promises for a great future.

Isaiah began with an introduction to the ultimate Source of the words he was about to speak: "Thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel" (Isaiah 43:1). Right from the beginning, Isaiah's words were encouraging: "The God who made you is now speaking to you." Reminiscent of David's words in Psalm 139:13-16, his message said, "God knows you. He formed you. All your days were already written into the Lord's books before you were formed. You are not just some random nation. God is not speaking to an anonymous rabble. He is reaching out to His beloved creation."

Isaiah now spoke God's words to the listeners:

Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by your name;
You are Mine.
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned,
Nor shall the flame scorch you.
For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior (Isaiah 43:1-3).

Read those words again. Let them sink in. How do they make you feel? This is the character of God. These words are who He is. And this message is not just for the people of Israel, but for all who belong to Him. He is saying, "I am God. I am the Creator of the heavens and the earth. Yes, I am the God of My beloved nation, Israel, that I have set apart, but I am the Savior of the people of the church too."

I don't know where you are right now or what situation you are in.

I just know that you need to believe in the Creator of the world. While His name may be the God of Israel, He is your personal Savior. Why do I have such peace in the middle of the COVID-19 insanity? The same God who told Israel not to worry about the Assyrian army is the same God who comforts me today with His love and power. The same God who can destroy a great superpower can certainly eradicate a virus.

The Lord continues:

I gave Egypt for your ransom,
Ethiopia and Seba in your place.
Since you were precious in My sight,
You have been honored,
And I have loved you;
Therefore I will give men for you,
And people for your life.
Fear not, for I am with you;
I will bring your descendants from the east,
And gather you from the west;
I will say to the north, "Give them up!"
And to the south, "Do not keep them back!"
Bring My sons from afar,
And My daughters from the ends of the earth—
Everyone who is called by My name,
Whom I have created for My glory;
I have formed him, yes, I have made him (Isaiah 43:3-7).

In those first seven beautiful verses of Isaiah 43 are the past, the present, and the future of Israel. And they contain His message of hope to "everyone who is called by My name," and that includes the church. His words are for all whom He has "created for [His] glory." That includes both the Jews who are His chosen nation, as well as all who believe in Him who are His beloved children. The message to all who will listen to Him is this: "When you feel alone, you are not. When you are afraid, remember that I am with you all the way. Even in the midst of the worst of situations, I am there."

We must understand the truth of God's presence in the midst of

the imperfect times. God didn't create the imperfect. God doesn't cause the imperfect. But God works through the imperfect. That's who He is. He is a perfect God who carries out His perfect will in imperfect people who live in an imperfect world. When God first created this universe, everything was perfect. The perfect God established His perfect creation by His perfect Word. Then humanity expressed the free will with which the Lord had gifted it, and everything blew apart. Sin entered the world, and with sin came death. Creation was separated from Creator.

God didn't create the imperfect.

God doesn't cause the imperfect.

But God works through the imperfect.

A NEED FOR HOPE

Picture Adam and Eve exiting the Garden of Eden. Inside the Garden, everything was beautiful. Food was plentiful and the surroundings were lush. But most wonderful of all, God was there. Fellowship with the Creator was readily available, and they would walk with Him in the cool of the day. But when they walked out, all of that "perfect" was left behind. What an empty, tragic moment.

It wasn't only mankind that suffered in that inaugural act of humanity's sinful rebellion. Nature experienced its own death throes as well. At the bite of the fruit, all creation was cursed with death. Mankind was given both spiritual and physical death. Because nature has no spirit, it only faced the latter. Every creature that has ever existed in the animal kingdom—from mosquito to mammoth, from microbe to meerkat—has had an expiration date. For each, life began. For each, life ended.

However, it isn't just the organic that faces physical death. The

inorganic, too, is dying. The mountains, rivers, and valleys were created perfectly. All natural systems and weather patterns and harvest cycles were established exactly as they should be. Then came sin, and with it, death—and the natural world has been on a downward slide ever since. Floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, and, yes, viruses are all part of the deterioration of God's perfect creation.

There is no hope for the natural world. It is in a hospice situation, and we are simply awaiting its final demise. No matter how many climate change protocols are established and how many fishing ships are pestered by Greenpeace, the decay and collapse of this world will not be halted. That doesn't mean we shouldn't take great care of our beautiful earth as stewards of God's creation. But there is a reason that when the end of time comes, God will establish new heavens and a new earth.

When it comes to humanity, however, there is hope. The natural world will be destroyed. In the words of pharaoh from Cecil B. DeMille's epic *The Ten Commandments*, "So let it be written, so let it be done." Destruction for you and me, though, has not been decreed and sealed. God has given us an opportunity to remove the death sentence of sin. The only effective solution for our sin problem is faith in Jesus Christ. He paid our penalty—He died our death on the cross.

When death is removed, what is left? Life. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Another way to look at that verse is to say that Jesus is the way to the truth that gives us life. By believing in Him as our Savior and committing to Him as our Lord, we are, in a sense, readmitted into the Garden—that glorious place where we can once again have peace and fellowship with our creator God.

GOD'S LONG-SUFFERING GRACE

Let's go back to those wonderful words of Isaiah 43. Trouble was coming for the nation of Judah. But along with the trouble came hope. God will not judge or afflict His people without also telling them the way out of their mess. As we've just seen with His plan for removing sin and reconciling us to Himself, there are situations we will face that

are too big for us to handle. But God will not leave us hanging helplessly. There is always hope when we look to Him. And where we find hope, that is where we find true peace.

Israel, as a nation, was far from perfect. The people had a strong propensity for rebellion, idol worship, and ignoring the law of God. There are many Christians these days who will say that because of the nation's imperfection, God has discarded them. Jesus Christ came to the Jews, but they didn't want anything to do with Him. "He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him" (John 1:11). The Jews rejected Him; therefore, He now rejects them. That's it, case closed, the Jews have been kicked to the curb in favor of the church.

Imagine if these Christians were to apply that same logic to themselves. Any sin is rebellion against God. How many acts of rebellion and rejection of God's lordship does it take to get booted out of the family? In the Garden, it took only one sin to separate us from God. I know I have plenty more than one sin to my credit since receiving Christ as my Savior. If sin can cause the Father to permanently reject His children, what percentage of the church could stand before God today?

But that's not the way He works, is it? A loving Father does not kick His children out of His family. He will bring hard times in order to discipline them. He will allow pain to straighten His people out. But the Lord who said that we should forgive not just seven times but "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22) does not put a credit limit on His mercy. Rather than see Israel's rebellion as a reason for God's rejection, we should see it as setting the stage for us to witness His glorious mercy. It is in the truth that God didn't reject a people as deserving of rejection as Israel that we find hope that God will never reject a people so deserving of rejection as are we, His church. And it is in this constancy of His love and commitment to us that we can find peace in the midst of a coronavirus crisis or any other trial we face.

Does our "no-matter-what" security in the family of God mean that sin doesn't really matter? Do we now have a free ticket to live however we want? God promised the Israelites through Isaiah that because of their hypocritical hearts and empty worship, He was going

to bring pain their way. Yet it would be the pain of discipline, not the destruction that accompanies judgment. God's long-suffering grace and patience are painted in beautiful colors when, in Isaiah 1, after an accusation of unfaithfulness and a declaration of the promised disciplinary suffering, the Lord says, "I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city" (verse 26). Because of God's love, He will never cast away His own. The hand that disciplines is the same hand that restores. There are times when God will allow us to go through the storm, but He always does it for a reason and only for a time.

THE POWERFUL PRESENCE OF GOD

That disciplining, restoring hand is also the hand that protects. Let's go back to Isaiah 43 and the coming of the Assyrians. There, God talked to a frightened nation that was about to be attacked by the most terrible superpower of the time. He reminded them, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Isaiah 43:2).

"Wait, Amir, isn't this an army attacking by land? Why is God talking about waters?" The Lord was reminding the people of Israel what happened back in Exodus 14, when they walked through the waters of the Red Sea. The massive superpower army of that day—the Egyptians—was charioting behind the Israelites, trapping the helpless people between death by sword and death by drowning. But then God did a miraculous work, and the Hebrews enjoyed a dry hike to the other side.

By the way, there is an underwater land bridge between the two sides of the Red Sea connecting Egypt and Saudi Arabia. It is a geographical feature that no one can explain. On the shore at either side of the land bridge are places that once had columns—from the time of King Solomon—that marked where the crossing of the Red Sea took place. So when the children of Israel passed through, they didn't have to walk all the way to the bottom of a deep ocean and then back up. They went across a land bridge that was much higher than all the

underwater terrain around it. Even before the Israelites knew they had a problem, God had led them to the exact place where He would solve that problem for them.

When the situation for the Egypt-fleeing Hebrews was at its worst, God was there. “The Angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel” (Exodus 14:19-20). This “Angel of God” was a Christophany—a revelation of Christ in the Old Testament. In a time of trouble, the preincarnate Jesus was there protecting His people. That’s how God operates, and He has proved His care for His people time after time.

When Israel was about to face the insurmountable walls of Jericho, the Lord appeared again—this time before Joshua.

Joshua went to Him and said to Him, “Are You for us or for our adversaries?” So He said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.” And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, “What does my Lord say to His servant?” Then the Commander of the LORD’s army said to Joshua, “Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy.” And Joshua did so (Joshua 5:13-15).

Just like with Moses and the burning bush, the ground was holy because God was there. The presence of an angel doesn’t make a place holy. It is the presence of God that sanctifies a location.

When Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were thrown into the fiery furnace, Christ was present with them:

King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished; and he rose in haste and spoke, saying to his counselors, “Did we not cast three men bound into the midst of the fire?” They answered and said to the king, “True, O king.” “Look!” he answered, “I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:24-25).

Jesus was in the fire with those three brave young men. He was there when the Israelites crossed the river and came to Jericho. He was there when the camp crossed the Red Sea. He was there! This is the same Jesus who, more than two-and-a-half millennia ago, commanded Israel to return to their land and is smoothing the path today as they continue to arrive.

This is the same Jesus who is now commanding you, wherever you live, “Fear not, for I am with you.” This is the promise of Psalm 23:4: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.” This is the hope found in Isaiah 35:4: “Say to those who are fearful-hearted, ‘Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you.’” God is with you. He is watching His people—in Israel and in the church.

There is no reason for us to fear what we see happening around us. Paul wrote, “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). Those three—power, love, and a sound mind—must come together for us to have true peace. We cannot overcome fear without the power of God. However, if we are not expressing His love to others, He may withhold His power in discipline. If we don’t have a sound mind and are doubting God’s truth and character, then we likely won’t turn to Him in our times of trouble. All three of those characteristics must be present in our lives for us to live with a God-given fearlessness.

A PROVEN FAITHFULNESS

I am in the middle of Israel, and it is peaceful here. Yet Israel is one of the most threatened countries on planet Earth. There is no other nation whose neighbors so openly vow to make it extinct. Amazingly, the rest of the world is okay with that. Even from the podium of the UN General Council, world leaders call for the destruction of Israel. Still, here I am, not only personally experiencing the peace of God, but looking at evidences of God’s peace all around me. What is the

coronavirus to God? Nothing. If you choose to fear rather than to trust Him who says, “Fear not,” then where is your faith?

God is faithful—a character quality He has demonstrated through this beautiful land and through the people whom He has brought home. His proven faithfulness is not something that I can remain quiet about. This is why Behold Israel was born. Behold Israel—“Look at His Land”—is proof that God exists. This is the evidence that He is faithful to all His promises. The reason God left Israel to stand even after its history of failure and rebellion is to serve as a testimony to you to not be afraid. The same God who has been faithful to this oft-times beleaguered nation is also faithful to you who are in the church.

God said that from Jacob He would create a nation. Then, as He worked through Jacob’s descendants, He said, “I will separate them. I will work through them. Through these rebellious people I will demonstrate My love; I will reveal My Word to the world; and I will bring My Son, the Messiah, to all mankind. And through this tiny nation I will prove that if you will humble yourself and pray and turn away from your wicked ways, I will forgive you. I will embrace you. I will call you My own.”

God is not in the business of destruction and punishment. People bring those sorrows upon themselves. In 2 Thessalonians 2:10-11, Paul said that it is only after people have rejected the love of the truth that can save them that God gives them delusions. He didn’t give them delusions so that they would reject the Word of God; He gave them delusions because they rejected the Word of God.

THE DAY OF SALVATION

God sent His only begotten Son to bring salvation to the world. This is the other side of the “God’s chosen people” coin. The common belief among the Jews was that God worked only with Israel. But then Jesus came into the world. When the time was right, the Messiah headed down to the Jordan River. When He arrived, He found a Jewish priest named Johanon—“God will have mercy.” This Johanon, or John, spotted Jesus and declared, “Behold! The Lamb of God who

takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). His words were not “of Israel,” but “of the world.”

This sacrificial Lamb of God is for you in Wuhan, China. It’s for you in Seoul. It’s for you in Singapore and Manila, in Tehran and Baghdad, in Ankara and Istanbul. Jesus died for you in Beirut and Damascus and Berlin and Frankfurt. He shed His blood for you in Paris, London, Barcelona, and Madrid—for you in Milan and Rome and Zagreb and Bucharest, in Budapest and Brussels and Amsterdam and Copenhagen. Salvation is available for you as a free gift in the United States from New York to Los Angeles, down south to Mexico City and São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Jesus is opening His arms to you in Auckland and Sydney and Melbourne and Perth, in Nairobi and Kampala, Lagos and Johannesburg.

When you open your heart to the love and forgiveness of Jesus Christ, He will make you a new person. He will spark a light in you—a light of new life, a light of eternity. Then He will use that light in you to shine His truth to the world. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount,

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

It is through your peace during crisis that those around you can discover God’s peace. It is through your lack of fear that your friends and family members will be able to see that with God, there is no need to fear.

Has the light of God entered your life so that you can be the light of the world? Do you have the Holy Spirit in you—the oil in your lamp—so that you can shine out His hope? And if you have been born anew into eternal life, are you letting your light shine?

Before His crucifixion, Jesus encouraged His disciples with these words: “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). This coronavirus is just a

tribulation of the world, as are all trials that befall you. Don't be afraid. Instead, be of good cheer, because Jesus has overcome the world.

It all comes down to our Savior. "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11-12).

Do you have the Son? Have you made Jesus your Savior and Lord? If not, today is the day of salvation. Why spend another day with questions filling your life? If you do have the Son, then rejoice. No matter what is going on around you—no matter what viruses may come your way—God is with you. And as He has done from the beginning of time, He will continue to care for His own—whether they are of the people of Israel or of the church, or, like me, of both.

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BEHOLD ISRAEL

Behold Israel is a nonprofit organization founded and led by native Israeli Amir Tsarfati. Its mission is to provide reliable and accurate reporting on developments in Israel and the surrounding region.

Through Behold Israel's website, free app, social media, and teachings in multiple languages, the ministry reaches communities worldwide. Amir's on-location teachings explain Israel's central role in the Bible and present the truth about current events amidst global media bias against Israel.

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